

Alexander Powertrail Fire -- After Action Review

9/18/2007

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Participants:

Charlie Webster	KNF Forest Fire Management Officer
Kevin Cardwell	Libby District Fire Management Officer
Nikia Hernandez	Libby District Assistant Fire Management Officer
Cam Goins	Alexander Powertrail Fire Incident Commander
Frank Waterman	Kootenai Interagency Dispatch Center Manager
Shawn Olveira	CDM
Courtney Zamora	VOLPE
Bonnie Lavelle	EPA

What was planned?

- Review pages 1 and 2 of the "Protocols for Rainy Creek Fire Suppression Restricted Zone (FSRZ)" (attached).

What actually happened?

- Fire Reported at 0928 on 9/14 by Blue Mtn. lookout.
- Air Attack platform was ordered. Type III Helicopter with bucket (48U) was dispatched. Type II helicopter was ordered.
- Helicopter 48U began bucket work at 1002. Lat/long for the fire indicates the fire is outside the Rainy Creek FSRZ and "Rainy Creek Fire Suppression Caution Zone" as indicated on the KDC map. Pilot's size up estimates the fire at "1 acre or better", "Heavy smoke in black". Pilot reports that heaviest smoke is in the black and that he should be able to hold things until the medium helicopter arrived.
- Aerial observer (Dale Smith/Air Attack) was ordered to the fire area for a reconnaissance flight. Air Attack arrived over the fire at 1226. Air Attack describes the "powerline road" as the best access and Lake Koocanusa as the best dip site.
- Helicopter 23PB with tank used the Kootenai River (same site as 48U) for filling tanks. Foam was utilized. Began bucket work at 1249.
- No retardant was ordered.
- Notifications to Forest FMO (FFMO) and D5 District Ranger were made. D5 FMO was on jury duty. D5 Duty Officer (Cameron Goins) was notified by FFMO of concerns of potential asbestos outside of the FSRZ.
- A type II restricted helicopter was assigned to the fire for sustained bucket work.
- Attempt was made to contact EPA (Mike Cirian) who was on vacation.

- Shawn Oliveira (CDM) and Courtney Zamora (VOLPE) were contacted. The Tony Ward research on tree bark as a reservoir for asbestos was discussed – it appears there is potential for asbestos outside the FSRZ in tree bark.
- Based on recommendations from Shawn Oliveira, firefighters were not mobilized into the fire area even though it was outside of the Rainy Creek FSRZ. Shawn did offer help if needed and did indicate that keeping the fire small was probably in the best interest of public safety.
- There were discussions (IC and FFMO) regarding the use of respirators by firefighters in the fire area to perform fire suppression activities.
- The Forest Supervisor was notified and briefed about the fire.
- Initial Attack IC (Cameron Goins) performed a reconnaissance flight in 48U. Flight departed Libby Helibase at 1230 and left fire at 1245.
- The IC was allowed to walk into the area to observe the fire behavior and to determine the fire cause. He was advised to avoid any ground disturbing activities and to stay out of the smoke by the FFMO.
- Three helicopters performed bucket work for a total of 26.9 hours from 9/14 through 9/17 for a total estimated cost of \$30,021
- A Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) was completed on 9/18. A confine strategy was selected with an expected cost of \$80,000.
- Appeared to be good communication during the incident with Agency Administrators, Fire Managers, and firefighters.
- Safe and effective response to the Alexander Powertrail fire.

Was WR Grace notified? Do they need to be? See Protocols.

Why did it happen?

- Well thought out fire suppression protocols had been developed that included contact lists, action items, and maps. Individuals involved were aware and understood the protocols.
- Due to concerns regarding firefighter safety based on the Tony Ward presentation, along with subsequent conversations with Shawn Oliveira, firefighters were not allowed on the ground to perform fire suppression activities. Fire monitors were allowed into the fire area.
- WFSA was developed to document decisions regarding selection of the appropriate management response as per the Forest Fire Management Plan.

What can/should we do next time? Sustain strengths, correct weaknesses, develop recommended action items.

Recommendations:

- Keep utilizing the protocols. Keep working with cooperating agencies, contractors, and researchers to keep updated. Ensure for firefighter and public safety.
- Develop a new "**Rainy Creek Fire Suppression Restriction Zone**" based on the best science.
- Develop a JHA for potential work activities in the FSRZ and attach to the plan.
- Determine if respirators will be required for FS employees. If so, develop required training/testing program (See USDA Health and Safety Code Handbook). If respirators will not be used by FS employees remove that option from the protocols.
- Review and update the "Protocols for Rainy Creek Fire Suppression Restricted Zone (FSRZ). Consider the following changes:
 - Rather than an aerial observer, mobilize an IC or Air Attack for aerial observation of the fire.
 - Change "helicopter with bucket" to "helicopter with bucket or tank".
 - Add "Forest Supervisor" to the initial notifications.
 - Add "consider ordering of a reconnaissance platform based on expected duration of the incident".
 - Add "develop a WFSA to help determine strategic actions and document management decisions".
 - Add "consider Area Closure for public safety".
 - Clarify who is making contacts to CDM, VOLPE, EPA, and WR Grace. Is one call from the KNF enough? Will other contractors/EPA/land owner be responsible for internal communications?
- Consider development of a large fire protocol plan. The development of that plan should involve all agencies with responsibilities (Kootenai NF, EPA, others?). What actions (strategy, tactics, public information, notifications, cost share, etc) would be needed if we had a large smoke column that originates from the area? Consider set up of "pumps" (?) and utilize ambient air quality samplers to test smoke to help make public health/safety decisions. Who should be responsible for public information / notification?
- Various dip sites were utilized, determine which area worked best for pilots and include that info Division write-ups.
- Determine when (fire size/fire behavior) a Type 1 helicopter might be more cost effective/efficient than a Type II helicopter. Add a rule of thumb to the initial action items or restate the last bullet as "Order a Type II or Type I helicopter for sustained bucket work".
- Involve the RO and NR MAC regarding potential fire suppression priorities.
- Involve the R1 Environmental Health Engineer (Bob Krikpatrick)

- Consider training FS employees for respirator use. Consider training equipment operators for fire suppression.
- Answer the questions: Fire suppression at what cost? Who should pay?

Next Steps:

- Participants to review the AAR notes and provide any edits/comments to Charlie Webster by 9/28.
- Kootenai NF to update current protocols based on recommendations listed above.
- Kootenai NF to develop a list of specific questions related to fire suppression activities in and around the Rainy Creek area for further discussion and plan development.
- Continue coordination and communication regarding ongoing research efforts.
- Meet prior to April 2008 to develop map with Fire Suppression Restriction Zone delineations based on the latest information/best science.
- Agencies (EPA and Kootenai NF) to share information/recommendations with Agency Administrators.

Protocols for Rainy Creek Fire Suppression Restricted Zone (FSRZ)

Updated: April 10, 2007 by Kevin Cardwell, D5 FMO

The following procedures will be used in the event of a wildland fire in Rainy Creek within the Fire Suppression Restricted Zone, which includes all WR Grace land surrounding the mine, not just the mine site terraces.

NO INTITAL ATTACK FIRE FIGHTERS ARE TO BE ASSIGNED ON THE GROUND, UNLESS IT IS POSITIVELY DETERMINED THE FIRE IS NOT WITHIN THE FIRE SUPPRESSION RESTRICTED ZONE IN RAINY CREEK.

FOR FIRES DETERMINED TO BE WITHIN THE FSRZ (Rainy Creek Watershed):

- Get an aerial observer over the fire as soon as possible.
- Initial Attack will consist of helicopter with bucket.
- Bucket work will NOT use the pond at the mine, but rather the Kootenai River, Koocanusa reservoir, or water source outside FSRZ.
- If fire behavior or other conditions warrant, order retardant.
- Notify D5 FMO, Forest FMO, and D5 Ranger of the fire ASAP.
- Order a Type II helicopter (restricted category, ok) for sustained bucket work.

Contact the EPA and advise them of the fire and request a liaison. Request information on the proper procedures to follow, given the geographical location of the fire, that will allow staffing the fire without putting firefighters at risk from asbestos exposure.

If it becomes apparent that bucket work and/or retardant may not hold the fire, the following people or their designated acting need to be contacted to determine a further course of action - (WFSA).

- Forest Supervisor
- Forest FMO
- Libby District Ranger
- Libby FMO
- Resource Advisor

It is imperative to make contact with the CDM, VOLPE, EPA:

Priority call list is as follows: (Updated April 10, 2007)

1. CDM – Shawn Oliveira, Health & Safety Leader
 - 406-293-8595 ext. 25
 - 406-293-1547 (cell phone)
2. CDM – Damon Repine, Health & Safety
 - 406-293-8595 ext. 38
 - 406-293-1374 (cell phone)
3. EPA – Mike Cirian, Libby Project Manager
 - 406-293-6194
 - 406-202-3791 (cell phone)
4. VOLPE – Courtney Zamora, Onsite Project Manager
 - 406-293-6194 (office)
 - 617-694-7699 (mobile phone)
5. EPA – Paul Peronard, Project Manager (Denver)
 - 303-312-6808 (Denver office)
 - 303-886-1638 (cell phone)
6. EPA – National Response Center, Region 8 Denver (24hrs)
 - 800-424-8802

Ensure notification of W.R. Grace through the above call list.

FOR FIRES DETERMINED TO BE OUTSIDE THE FSRZ, BUT ACCESS IS VIA TUBB GULCH, THOMAS GULCH OR UPPER RAINY CREEK:

If there is a need to access the Tubb Gulch road system (rd #: 1018, 4755) and Thomas Gulch for fire suppression, special requirements must be met. Contact the EPA. After hours, use the numbers above to contact the guard to open the gate. The Rainy Cr. road has been paved for the first two miles. If you leave the asphalt, respirators with P100 canisters are required, whether you are going 100 ft., quarter mile or a couple miles. No white Tyvek suits are necessary. Any vehicle that leaves the pavement and drives on the contaminated road must go through the decontamination station located at the two mile mark on the Rainy Creek Road. EPA will assist in the DECON process. The EPA also has dirt moving equipment and water tenders to assist upon request.

If there is a need to access upper Rainy Cr. via road #401 South Fork Jackson Creek to road #4750 for fire suppression, no special requirements need to be met.